

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 376

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CEBU 0030

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: IBP ELECTION - KBL EXPECTED TO SWEEP REGION VI

REF: MANILA 2940

1. SUMMARY. THE PRO-MARCOS KBL (NEW SOCIETY MOVEMENT) SLATE IS EXPECTED TO SWEEP THE APRIL 7 INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA (IBP) ELECTION IN REGION VI, THE WESTERN VISAYAS. THE KBL FACES NO ORGANIZED OPPOSITION, ALTHOUGH 22 INDEPENDENTS HAVE ENTERED THE RACE FOR THE 16 SEATS AT STAKE IN THE REGION. ALTHOUGH NO INDEPENDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO WIN ON A REGIONAL BASIS, A FEW ENJOY SIGNIFICANT LOCAL BACKING. THEIR SHOWING AGAINST THE MARCOS-BACKED KBL CANDIDATES COULD GIVE THE PRESIDENT AN INDICATION OF WHICH POLITICAL FACTION IS STRONGEST IN A GIVEN LOCALITY. ON A NATIONWIDE BASIS, HOWEVER, BACOLOD CITY'S YOUTHFUL MAYOR, WHO IS CLOSE TO IMELDA MARCOS, TOLD CONSOFF THAT MARCOS WILL PERMIT APPROXIMATELY 10 PERCENT OF THE 165 ELECTED IBP SEATS TO BE WON BY NON-KBL CANDIDATES. BLOC VOTING WILL HAVE NO BEARING ON THIS OUTCOME, ACCORDING TO THE MAYOR, WHO SAID THAT IT IS IN THE COUNTING AND NOT IN THE CASTING OF VOTES THAT THE ELECTION WILL BE DECIDED. END SUMMARY.

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2. CONSOFF TOURED ELECTORAL REGION VI WEEK OF MARCH 6 TO OBSERVE ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS. 16 SEATS ARE AT STAKE IN THIS REGION, WHICH COMPRISES THE FOUR PROVINCES OF THE ISLAND OF PANAY (AKLAN, ANTIQUE, CAPIZ, AND ILOILO) AND THE SUGAR-RICH PROVINCE OF NEGROS OCCIDENTAL ON NEARBY NEGROS. THE TOUR INCLUDED VISITS TO ILOILO CITY AND ANTIQUE ON PANAY AND TO BACOLOD ON NEGROS.

3. THE KBL HAS FIELDDED A FULL STATE OF CANDIDATES IN REGION VI AND IS OPPOSED BY 22 UNORGANIZED INDEPENDENTS, A FEW OF WHOM ENJOY SOME LOCALIZED SUPPORT. NONE OF THE INDEPENDENTS IF CREDITED WITH SUFFICIENT REGIONAL SUPPORT, HOWEVER, TO PERMIT VICTORY IN THE REGION-WIDE ELECTORAL DISTRICT, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF BLOC VOTING.

4. KBL SLATE. THE COMPOSITION OF THE KBL'S SLATE SUGGEST THAT OLD SOCEITY POLITICIANS WITH WELL-ENTRENCHED LOCAL POLITICAL BASES PLAYED THE MAJOR HAND IN ITS FORMATION. BEYOND DECIDING WHICH LOCAL POLITICIANS COULD CHOOSE CANDIDATES, MANILA APPARENTLY PLAYED LITTLE DIRECT ROLE IN SLATE COMPOSITION. CANDIDATES FROM NEGROS WERE SELECTED BY INCUMBENT GOVERNOR ALFREDO MONTELIBANO, JR., AND FORMER CONGRESSMAN ARMANDO GUSTILLO, PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATION OF SUGARCANE PLANTERS. IN ILOILO FORMER CONGRESSMAN FERMIN CARAM, JR., HAD A MAJOR VOICE IN CHOOSING CANDIDATES. ILOILO GOVERNOR CONRADO NORADA, ELECTED AS A LIBERAL, ALSO APPARENTLY HAD SOME VOICE IN SELECTION; HE REPORTEDLY IS DILIGENTLY SUPPORTING THE KBL TICKET BUT IS AN INDIAN RATHER THAN A CHIEF IN THE CAMPAIGN. ILOILO CITY'S APPOINTED MAYOR, ZAFIRO LEDESMA, TOLD CONSOFF THAT HE HAS BEEN COMCpletely "IGNORED" IN THE ENTIRE PROCESS. HE HAS, HOWEVER, ENDORSED THE KBL SLATE. ALTHOUGH NOT A POLITICIAN -- HE WAS A

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SUCCESSFUL ELDERLY, THOUGH VIGOROUS (DESPITE HEART PROBLEMS) BUSINESSMAN WHEN DIRECTED BY MARCOS TO ASSUME THE MAYORSHIP--LEDESMA APPEARED MIFFED THAT HE IS BEING OVERLOOKED, THOUGH HE PROFESSES OTHERWISE.

5. THE KBL SLATE IS HEADED BY SOFTSPOKEN JOSE VARELA, JR., BROTHER-IN-LAW OF SUGARCANE PLANTERS FEDERATION PRESIDENT GUSTILLO. VARELA, A NEWCOMER TO POLITICS, DOES PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR THE FEDERATION, AND IS WELL AND GENERALLY FAVORABLY KNOWN IN NEGROS AS A RESULT OF HIS TELEVISION INTERVIEW PROGRAM. VARELA TOLD CONSOFF THAT THE CAMPAIGN IS GOING VERY WELL, AND THAT WHILE HE DREADS BECOMING OVERCONFIDENT HE BELIEVES IT WOULD TAKE A "MARACLE" FOR THE KBL NOT TO SWEEP THE ELECTION IN REGION VI. VARELA DOES NOT OVERVALUE

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THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA, RECOGNIZING, HE SAID, THAT REAL LEGISLATIVE POWER WILL REST WITH PRESIDENT MARCOS. VARELA ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE BELIEVES THE IBP CAN PERFORM A REAL SERVICE BY DEVELOPING A BADLY NEEDED SUCCESSION MECHANISM SO THAT CHAOS CAN BE AVOIDED SHOULD MARCOS PASS FROM THE SCENE.

6. OTHER NEGROS CANDIDATES ARE CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE PRODUCTION OF SUGAR, AND INCLUDE THE FORMER VICE MAYOR OF SAN CARLOS CITY, RODRIGO LAYUMAS; ALFONSO GARCIA, REGIONAL GOVERNOR OF THE LIONS CLUB; ROBERTO GATUSLAO; TEODORE BENEDICTO, A DISTANT RELATIVE OF SUGAR COMMISSIONER AND KBL VICE CHAIRMAN ROBERTO BENEDICTO; AND REMO MONTELIBANO, A COUSIN OF THE NEGROS OCCIDENTAL GOVERNOR AND REGOTEDLY A BARRIO CAPTAIN.

7. THE PRINCIPAL CANDIDATE FROM ILOILO IS FORMER CONGRESSMAN FERMIN CARAM, JR. OTHER ILOILO-BASED CANDIDATES INCLUDE SALVADOR BRITANICO, FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DELEGATE; LEOPOLDO LOCSIN, WHOSE FATHER WAS A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DELEGATE; AND NIEL TUPAZ, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPAL JUDGES. IN CAPIZ, RELATIVE UNKNOWNNS SELECTED BY FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER CORNELIO VILLAREAL, SR., AND HIS SON,
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GOVERNOR OF THE PROVINCE ARE RUNNING ON THE KBL SLATE.

8. LOCAL CONTESTS: ILOILO, ANTIQUE. IN ILOILO, ACCORDING TO MAYOR LEDESMA, FERMIN CARAM, JR., FACES STRONG LOCAL OPPOSITION FROM PASCUAL ESPINOSA. A FORMER NACIONALISTA CONGRESSMAN FROM ILOILO, ESPINOSA

APPARENTLY WANTED CARAM'S SLOT ON THE KBL SLATE AND WHEN HE DIDN'T GET IT DECIDED TO RUN INDEPENDENTLY. HIS GOAL IS TO OBTAIN MORE VOTES IN ILOILO CITY THAN CARAM. LEDESMA BELIEVES THIS IS POSSIBLE, BUT DOUBTS THAT ANY NON-KBL CANDIDATE CAN WIN THROUGHOUT THE REGION BECAUSE OF BLOC VOTING. NONETHELESS LEDESMA BELIEVES THE ELECTION AT LEAST COULD DEMONSTRATE TO MALACANANG WHO IS THE MORE POPULAR CANDIDATE IN ILOILO.

9. IN ANTIQUE, THE YOUNG LIBERAL GOVERNOR, EVELIO JAVIER, MAKES NO ATTEMPT TO HIDE HIS DISAPPOINTMENT AT MARCOS' CHOICE OF ARTURO PACIFICADOR AS KBL CANDIDATE FROM HIS PROVINCE. JAVIER ALLEGES THAT PACIFICADOR, BROTHER OF THE FORMER GOVERNOR, WHOM HE DEFEATED IN 1971 FOR THE GOVERNORSHIP, IS A VENAL MAN WITH NO LOCAL FOLLOWING. JAVIER REPORTEDLY FOUGHT MARCOS TO THE BITTER END, ATTEMPTING TO GET ANDRECITO FORNIER ON THE KBL SLATE. FAILING IN THIS ATTEMPT, JAVIER, A 1973 U.S. INTERNATIONAL VISITOR GRANTEE, IS ACTIVELY SUPPORTING FORNIER'S CANDIDACY AS AN INDEPENDENT. ALTHOUGH THE ROAD INTO SAN JOSE, ANTIQUE, WAS LIBERALLY PLASTERED WITH "VOTE STRAIGHT KBL" POSTERS, JAVIER TOLD CONSOFF THAT "I AM WORKING FOR THE KBL, BUT PRAYING FOR THE INDEPENDENTS." JAVIER APPEARS TO BE JEOPARDIZING HIS CHANCES OF REMAINING GOVERNOR BY HIS GENERALLY KNOWN OPPOSITION TO PACIFICADOR.

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10. ELECTION PROSPECTS: 10 PERCENT NATIONWIDE FOR THE "OPPOSITION" THROUGHOUT THE REGION, OBSERVERS SAW LITTLE CHANCE OF ANYTHING EXCEPT A KBL SWEEP. LACK OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION, BLOC VOTING, AND THE REGIONAL BASE OF THE ELECTION POSE INSUPERABLE ODDS FOR INDEPENDENTS.

11. BACOLOD CITY'S ACTING MAYOR, RAYMUNDO DIZON, JR., ECHOED THESE VIEWS IN CONVERSATION WITH CONSOFF, PREDICTING A KBL SWEEP. DIZON, WHO REPORTEDLY IS CLOSE TO IMELDA MARCOS, THEN CONFIDED TO CONSOFF, ASKING THAT HE BE PROTECTED AS THE SOURCE, THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS HAD TOLD MAYORS AND GOVERNORS THAT ON A NATIONWIDE BASIS HE WILL PERMIT APPROXIMATELY 10 PERCENT NON-KBL CANDIDATES TO WIN SEATS, OR PERHAPS 15 OR 16 SEATS IN ALL. IN RESPONSE TO CONSOFF'S COMMENT THAT BLOC VOTING WOULD COMPLICATE ACHIEVING THIS RESULT, DIZON DISMISSED THAT NOTION, SAYING THAT THE ELECTION WOULD BE DECIDED IN THE COUNTING, AND NOT IN THE CASTING, OF VOTES. THE DESIRED RESULTS WOULD BE ARRANGED AFTER VOTE COUNTS ARE TURNED INTO MANILA. FOR DIZON, THE REMAINING QUESTION IS WHICH OF THE NON-KBL CANDIDATES WOULD GET MARCOS'

BELSSING. HE SPECULATED THAT THERE WOULD BE A FEW FROM MANILA, A FEW FROM CEBU, AND ONE OR TWO FROM SEVERAL OTHER REGIONA SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HE PERSONALLY BELIEVES THAT BENIGNO AQUINO WILL BE PERMITTED TO WIN IN MANILA, FOR "INTERNATIONAL CONSUMPTION," BUT WONDERED WHETHER IF ELECTED AQUINO WOULD BE PERMITTED TO SIT IN THE ASSEMBLY. DIZON CONCLUDED THAT AQUINO PROBABLY WOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE HIS SEAT, BUT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD KEEP THE JUDGMENT IN HIS ASSASSINTAION-CONSPIRACY CASE UNRESOLVED IN ORDER TO HAVE SOME MEANS TO EXERCISE SOME CONTROL OVER HIM IN THE IBP.

12. COMMENT: THE RECE IN REGION VI APPEARS TO BE, AS ONE WAG TOLD THE CONSOFF, "A SELECTION, NOT AN ELECTION." LOCAL CONTESTS, PARTICULARLY IN ILOILO CITY AND ANTIQUE, CONFIDENTIAL

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WILL BEAR WATCHING AS INDICATORS OF LOCAL STRENGTHS OF COMPETING POLITICAL FACTIONS. WHETHER BACOLOD MAYOR DIZON'S COMMENTS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE NATIONWIDE ELECTION RESULTS ARE ACCURATE REMAIN TO BE SEEN, BUT DIZON HAS BEEN A FRANK AND ACCURATE SOURCE IN THE PAST. END COMMENT.

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